

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 36374 01 OF 03 082128Z

67

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 IO-13 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 36374

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TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: PARISIEN LIBERE AND THE CGT PRINTERS UNION

1. SUMMARY. 21-MONTH OLD CONFLICT BETWEEN PARIS DAILY
PARISIEN LIBERE AND CGT PRINTERS UNION CAME TO A HEAD
ON DECEMBER 5 WHEN POLICE FORCEFULLY EVICTED PRINTERS
THAT HAD OCCUPIED PARISIEN LIBERE PLANT AND IN RESPONSE
UNION SHUT FRANCE'S NEWSPAPERS FOR TWO DAYS. GOF APPOIN-
TED MEDIATOR TO SEEK SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT BUT IT IS
GENERALLY RECOGNIZED THAT PARISIEN LIBERE MANAGEMENT
HAS WON AND THE ISSUE NOW HAS BEEN REDUCED TO A SEARCH
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PAGE 02 PARIS 36374 01 OF 03 082128Z

FOR A FACE-SAVING DEVICE FOR CGT AND SECONDARILY FOR GOF

WHICH FOUND ITSELF UNDER FIRE FROM BOTH UNION AND GAULLISTS. END SUMMARY

2. FOR 21 MONTHS THE CGT CONTROLLED PRINTING TRADE UNION WHICH HAD A MONOPOLY IN THE PRINTING AND PUBLISHING INDUSTRIES HAS BEEN FIGHTING AGAINST THE ANTI-REDUNDANCY AND FEATHERBEDDING ACTIONS OF EMILIEN AMAURY, PUBLISHER OF THE PARIS DAILY PARISIEN LIBERE (PL), CIRCULATION 500,000. AMAURY IS A HARD-NOSED BUSINESSMAN, EMINENTLY SUCCESSFUL IN THE PUBLISHING BUSINESS SINCE IN ADDITION TO PL HE OWNS A NUMBER OF OTHER MASS CIRCULATION PUBLICATIONS. HE QUIETLY BUILT A HIGHLY MODERN PRINTING PLANT OUTSIDE PARIS AND WHEN THE CGT UNION REFUSED TO ACCEPT LAYOFFS AND ELIMINATION OF FEATHERBEDDING AS A CONDITION TO WORKING IN THE NEW PLANT, AMAURY ABANDONED THE OLD PLANT, IGNORED THE CGT UNION AND HIRED FULL-TIME PRINTERS ORGANIZED BY FORCE OUVRIERE. THUS 625 PRINTING TRADE PERSONNEL ENGAGED IN THE PL PRODUCTION UNDER THE OLD SYSTEM FOUND THEMSELVES WITHOUT A DIRECT CONNECTION WITH A SPECIFIC JOB.

3. THE CLOSED SHOP UNION SYSTEM IN THE PRINTING INDUSTRY WAS PUT INTO EFFECT IN 1945, AND IRONICALLY, WITH AMAURY'S ASSISTANCE. ACCORDING TO THIS SYSTEM, THE UNION ACTS LIKE A CONTRACTOR RECEIVING THE TOTAL REMUNERATION FOR A GIVEN PRINTING JOB AS MEASURED BY THEORETICAL STANDARDS OF AMOUNT OF WORK AND WORKERS REQUIRED AND DISTRIBUTES THE PAY TO THE INDIVIDUAL WORKERS. AS A RESULT IT IS REPORTED THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE PRINTERS IN THE UNION MAKE BETWEEN 4 TO 6 THOUSAND FRANCS FOR AS LITTLE AS 20 HOURS OF ACTUAL WORK PER WEEK. IN LIGHT OF THIS SYSTEM THE 625 PL WORKERS REFUSED TO CONSIDER THEMSELVES AS LAID OFF OR UNEMPLOYED AND CONTINUED TO RECEIVE MINIMUM UNION RATE PAY. THEY WERE IN EFFECT SUBSIDIZED BY THE OTHER UNION MEMBERS.

4. TAKING A LEAF FROM LIP, THE PL PRINTERS SET OUT TO CHALLENGE AMAURY AND PROMPTLY OCCUPIED THE PARIS PLANT. THIS OCCUPATION WAS MORE A SYMBOLIC GESTURE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PARIS 36374 01 OF 03 082128Z

THAN A PRESSURE TACTIC SINCE AMAURY HAD NO USE FOR THAT PLANT. THE OCCUPATION, HOWEVER, GAVE THE UNION AMPLE OFFICE SPACE FROM WHICH TO ORGANIZE A MASSIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST PL INCLUDING INTERCEPTION AND DESTRUCTION OF THOUSANDS OF PL COPIES AND THE PRINTING OF PROTEST LITERATURE ON PL MASTHEAD.

5. FURTHERMORE THE UNION USED EVERY PRETEXT OFFERED BY

EVENTS TO CALL FOR NEWSPAPER STRIKES WITH THE RESULT THAT THE 21-MONTH PERIOD IN CONNECTION PRODUCED MORE PRESSLESS DAYS THAN IN ALL OF THE 60'S EXCEPT FOR 1968. ONE SUCH PRETEXT WAS THE JUNE 1975 LOWER COURT DECISION ORDERING THE EVACUATION OF THE PLANT AND THE NOVEMBER 30, 1976 DECISION OF THE COURT OF APPEALS SUSTAINING THE PREVIOUS JUDGMENT.

6. EARLY SUNDAY MORNING (DECEMBER 5), HELMETED POLICE

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PAGE 01 PARIS 36374 02 OF 03 082130Z

67

ACTION EUR-12

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 03 PARIS 36374

MOVED TO THE AMAURY PLANT BREAKING DOWN BARRICADES WITH BULLDOZERS AND PEACEFULLY EVACUATED THE OCCUPIED PREMISES. DISPLAY OF SUBSTANTIAL POLICE FORCE DISCOURAGED THE UNION MEMBERS FROM OFFERING ANY RESISTANCE OR OTHERWISE CHALLENGING THE POLICE WHO WERE ACTING UNDER COVER OF A COURT ORDER.

7. UNION REACTION, ESPECIALLY AT THE CGT NATIONAL HEAD-QUARTERS, WAS QUICK BUT RELATIVELY MEASURED IN TONE. AFTER CONSULTATIONS AMONG CGT, CFDT AND FEN, A 24-HOUR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 PARIS 36374 02 OF 03 082130Z

STRIKE FOR DECEMBER 6 WAS CALLED WHICH WAS SUBSEQUENTLY EXTENDED TO DECEMBER 7, THUS PREVENTING THE PUBLICATION OF NEWSPAPERS THROUGHOUT FRANCE. IRONICALLY, PARISIEN LIBERE BENEFITTED BY THE STRIKE SINCE ITS FO UNION WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE STRIKE AND WAS THEREFORE THE ONLY PARISIAN PAPER TO CONTINUE PUBLICATION. IN ADDITION THE CGT-CFDT AND FEN WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE PARTIES OF THE LEFT ORGANIZED A SUCCESSFUL PROTEST MARCH FROM PLACE DE LA REPUBLIQUE TO THE OPERA ON DECEMBER 6. FO, CFTC AND CGC REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE. HOWEVER, FO ISSUED A STATEMENT CONDEMNING THE FORCEFUL EVACUATION OF THE PLANT BY THE POLICE WHILE CALLING ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT "FREEDOM TO WORK DOES NOT EXIST IN THE PARIS PRESS NOW IN CERTAIN CITIES IN THE PROVINCES, BECAUSE OF HIRING-HALL MONOPOLY EXERCISED BY THE CGT PRINTERS' UNION."

8. IN ORDER TO ATTENUATE THE IMPACT OF THE POLICE ACTION, A STATEMENT WAS ISSUED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND THE LABOR MINISTER WAS INTERVIEWED ON RADIO-TV TO ANNOUNCE THAT IMMEDIATE ACTION WAS BEING TAKEN TO RELAUNCH NEGOTIATIONS TO RESOLVE THE PL CONFLICT. IN THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 6, THE PRIME MINISTER WENT ON TELEVISION TO DECLARE THAT IN EVACUATING THE PRINTERS THE GOVERNMENT WAS ENFORCING THE LAWS OF THE COUNTRY AND COURT DECISIONS. HE PROMISED TO CONTINUE TO DO SO. HE WAS THUS RESPONDING NOT ONLY TO UNION ACCUSATIONS BUT ALSO TO GAULLIST INSINUATIONS THAT DELIBERATELY GOTTIMED ITS EVACUATION ACTION TO COINCIDE WITH CHIRAC'S RALLY FOR THE REPUBLIC SO AS TO DEPRIVE IT OF MUCH DESIRED PUBLICITY.

9. FOLLOWING SEPARATE CONSULTATION WITH AMAURY AND THE UNION THE LABOR MINISTER ANNOUNCED THE APPOINTMENT OF JEAN-FRANCOIS MONTIN, A STATE COUNSELOR KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE NEWSPAPER BUSINESS, AS MEDIATOR IN THE SEARCH OF A SOLUTION TO THE 21-MONTH OLD CONFLICT.

PROMPTLY AFTER THAT THE UNION CALLED OFF THE STRIKE
BUT NOT ALL PARIS NEWSPAPERS WERE ABLE TO GO TO PRINT
IN TIME FOR THE WEDNESDAY MORNING NEWSTANDS.

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PAGE 03 PARIS 36374 02 OF 03 082130Z

10. NOW THAT THE PL SITUATION SEEMS TO BE ENTERING A
CONCLUSIVE PHASE, THE FOLLOWING POINTS NEED TO BE KEPT
IN MIND IN ASSESSING RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE
FUTURE:

(A) THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT AMAURY HAS SUCCE-
DED IN WHAT HE SET OUT TO DO, NAMELY BREAK THE STRANGLE
HOLD OF THE CGT UNION AND THEREBY FREE HIMSELF FROM
THE 1945 CLOSED-SHOP SYSTEM OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE
PRINTING AND PUBLISHING INDUSTRY.

(B) ACCORDINGLY, AMAURY HAS NO INTEREST AND NO
REASON TO NEGOTIATE. HE IS NOT A DEMANDEUR OF ANYTHING
FROM THE UNION OR GOF. HE HAS RESIGNED FROM THE PROFES-
SIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PUBLISHERS AND PRINTING COMPANIES
AND HAS THEREFORE PLACED HIMSELF OUTSIDE THE AS-
SOCIATION'S LIMITED DISCIPLINARY JURISDICTION. IF ANY-
THING, AMAURY CAN THUMB HIS NOSE AT HIS COLLEAGUES FOR
HAVING FOUND THE GUTS AND THE BRAINS TO OUTMANEUVER AND
OUTLAST THE CGT PRINTING TRADE UNION. IT WILL BE DIF-
FICULT FOR HIS COLLEAGUES AND COMPETITORS TO HIDE THEIR
ENVY FOR WHAT HE WAS ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH.

(C) THE APPOINTMENT OF A MEDIATOR SHOULD BE SEEN
AS A CONFIRMATION OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DIRECT
NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN AMAURY AND THE UNION AND OF THE
DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A COMPROMISE AT THIS TIME. IN
HIS FIRST DECLARATION MONTIN DID NOT HIDE THE FACT THAT
HE HAS A THANKLESS JOB AHEAD OF HIM.

(D) CGT IS OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF THE FOREGOING AND
RECOGNIZES THAT THE SEARCH NOW IS ONLY FOR THE PROVER-
BIAL FACE-SAVING FORMULA. IN FACT, THE MERE FACT THAT
THERE IS PRESENTLY TALK ABOUT NEGOTIATIONS, EVEN IF
THROUGH A MEDIATOR, IS BEING SEIZED BY CGT TO SHOUT
VICTORY, A TYPICAL CGT AND PL PERFORMANCE WHEN A DEFEAT

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PAGE 01 PARIS 36374 03 OF 03 082132Z

67

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 03 OF 03 PARIS 36374

CAN NO LONGER BE AVOIDED OR CONCEALED. EARLY RETIREMENT FOR THE 625 EMPLOYEES, INCREASED RETIREMENT OR OTHER BENEFITS, ESPECIALLY THOSE CONNECTED WITH SEPARATION INDEMNITIES, MAY BE SOME OF THE SECONDARY SUBJECTS ON WHICH THE MEDIATOR MAY FIND USEFUL TO CONCENTRATE.

(E) FINALLY THE RPR'S REACTION TO THE SUNDAY MORNING EVENTS CHARACTERIZING THEM AS BRUTAL USE OF FORCE WAS NOT WELCOME IN CGT HEADQUARTERS. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE SENIOR JOURNALIST, BOTH SEGUY AND KRASUCKI OF CGT SAW IN THE RPR STATEMENTS AN ATTEMPT TO RECAPTURE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 PARIS 36374 03 OF 03 082132Z

THE 1.5 MILLION VOTERS DE GAULLE HAD BEEN ABLE TO TAKE AWAY FROM THE LEFT. ACCORDINGLY CGT HAS STUDIOUSLY IGNORED CHIRAC'S REACTION OR HIS FOLLOWERS' ALLEGATIONS ABOUT GOF'S POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS BEHIND TIMING OF PL

PLANT EVACUATION.

(F) ALTHOUGH THE PL ISSUE COULD NOT SERVE AS A CATALYST TO THE CREATION OF A UNITED LABOR FRONT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, IT CAN SERVE AS A PRETEXT FOR SUCH COMMON FRONT IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ISSUES ON WHICH THE UNIONS AND THE GOF ARE AT LOGGERHEADS. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THIS WAS PROVIDED ON DECEMBER 6 WHEN THE GAS AND ELECTRICITY UNIONS CALLED FOR A THREE-HOUR STRIKE IN THE AFTERNOON WHICH PRODUCED CUTS IN THESE UTILITIES IN VARIOUS PARTS OF PARIS. THE CLIMATE OF PROTEST WHICH THE PL AFFAIR CREATED PRECIPITATED THE EDF-GDF UNION ACTION AS A WARNING TO GOF.

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